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ABSTRACT

Although there is general agreement upon a number of factors that contribute to early school success, the extent to which the student population has changed since the inception of most curricula and teaching methods has created some unique problems. This paper describes the Manzo-Meeks-Eanet Difference Inventory, which was devised to measure the degree to which students' backgrounds and attitudes coincide with the expectations of schools, and which was used in a survey of the reading needs of secondary-level students attending a city high school with a multiethnic population. The inventory consists of statements designed to tap students' self-concepts and social orientations, as well as to gauge socioeducational factors which might influence academic achievement. Items are grouped in the following categories: temperament and hope, familiarity with life options, exposure to cognitive and aesthetic pursuits, family unit, biological and attitudinal factors essential to traditional classwork, and family expectations as identified with cultural strata. Results of administration of the inventory to samples of several populations in the Kansas City, Missouri, area are outlined. (KS)

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A 'Difference' Inventory: Construction, Supporting Data, Implications

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There is general agreement upon a number of factors that contribute to early school success. Among these factors (labeled Reading Facilitating Experiences by George, 1975), are parents reading to child, the child working with paper and pencil, parental desire for higher education for the child, and other such considerations. Educators have not been able to discern, however, what contributes to success thereafter; we do know that culture, life-style, temperament, and self and social concepts are related. More, we know logically that success in school, particularly with culturally-loaded activities such as reading, will be facilitated or inhibited by the extent to which the student's experiential background and attitudes are compatible with those assumed by the school. The alarming question centers around the extent to which student populations are altered from those which were assumed when most curriculum and teaching methodogy were established.

There have been drastic modifications which have occurred even within the core-culture in these recent years. Institutions such as the Church no longer sway the moral consciousness of society, nor do institutions, in total, possess the power of dictate over the private lives of their members. Exposes by the media have deepened the concern for governmental integrity. In a grouping, fluctuating society, students cannot help but be caught up in the "push-pull" effect of the tides of change. Baltes and Nesselrode (1972) indicate that

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the nature of adolescent trait change is less dictated by age-related components than by changing environmental and social patterns. These undercurrents of change are sure to be reflected in students responsiveness and receptiveness in the classroom. While token strides in curriculum adaptation are in evidence, for the most part, the schools remain bastions of yesterday's cultural values, and without data to support necessary change.

Proposed is the employment of instruments, with potential for adaptation to specific localities, which will allow a school district to collect data and determine if its student population, or any individual within that population, is having difficulty learning because he is simply different from the assumptions on which school life is based.

The idea of "difference" as a factor influencing learning is best understood when reviewed in constrast to other components of evaluation. Weiner and Cromer (1967) suggest a four dimensional model for evaluation which provides a proper perspective. They differentiate defect, deficiency, disruption, and difference. While current assessment batteries typically contain instruments that (more or less) measure the key factors in defect (such as intelligence and visual perceptions) and deficiency (reading and related abilities), the batteries tend to lack instruments to assess disruption (emotionality), and difference (alternate styles). We propose the Manzo-Meeks-Eanet Difference Inventory* as a model for such an instrument; one that will attempt to feret out a mismatch between the individual and the learning condition he is facing. Through this expansion of the difference category, we are able to assess a genre of socio-educational factors that could affect reading achievement.

*A modification of the Manzo-Newman Inventory, 1974.

The Instrument and Its Development

The MME Difference Inventory was devised for use in a survey of the reading needs of secondary school students attending a city high school with a multi-ethnic population. It has since been used with Transitional Year programs and professional school reading courses at the University of Missouri - Kansas City. The instrument attempts to estimate the extent to which student self-confidence, background, experiences, values, and attitudes are the same or different from professional staff perceptions and standard expectations upon which school programming is largely based. The instrument can give an indication of the degree to which students differ as well as some indication of how they differ.

The MME Difference Inventory consists of two separate forms: Student and Professional. The student form contains a total of seventy-four statements. The student is asked to study each statement, and on a scale of one (low) to five (high), rank the extent to which he thinks the statement describes him or expresses how he feels.

The first twenty-five statements are a self and social construct scale based on the paradigmatic questions "Do you like yourself?" "How much?" "In what ways?"

Items 26-74 measure feelings and life style that can be related to socio-educational factors which might influence academic achievement. These are important because, as we look at the assumptions of most schools, we find them to be Anglo, sedentary, family/church/order-oriented and based on the belief that students have had fair opportunities to sample life's alternatives. Immediate data suggest that few, even medical students and other high achievers, are any longer cast in that mold. Items are grouped in the following six categories:

1. Temperament and hope. What is sought in this category is evidence that an individual is at ease and ready for the next step in development, which in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Scale would be cognitive and aesthetic pursuits. Analysis of responses would also produce insight into a student's level of motivation. Examples: I like poetry; I feel it is important to write well.
2. Familiarity with life options. Are students aware of possible choices and options for professional, entrepreneural or trade vocations? Most young people today rarely see adults engaged in their occupations. Examples: I feel that I could open by own business; I feel it would be reasonable for me to strive to become a congressman (congresswoman).
3. Exposure to cognitive and aesthetic pursuits. This category taps into participation in broadening experiences. Examples: I have done some traveling for pleasure and enrichment; We receive several different kinds of magazines at home.
4. Family unit. Does the student's family function as a traditional unit? Examples: My family usually eats at least one meal a day together; My father and mother live at home.
5. Biological and attitudinal factors essential to traditional classwork. Is the student physically and emotionally prepared for activities necessary for academic achievement? Examples: I eat a good breakfast; I get plenty of sleep (at least 7 hours).
6. Family expectations identified with cultural strata. How closely does the student identify with cultural values typical of middle class? Examples: I like good, but conservative and reserved clothing; I like plants.

The Professional Form is comprised of the last forty-five items of the Student Form. The statements are worded in a manner permitting the Professional staff to reflect their views of the dominant condition or life style among their students.

Quasi-normative Data

The MME Difference Inventory has been administered to samples of several populations within the greater Kansas City metropolitan area. The subjects were junior high, senior high, junior college, and professional school students from diverse backgrounds. Baseline data were collected primarily to establish means and standard ranges for student groups of typical concern. The means are displayed too as a form of validation for the instrument; i.e., are there differences between first year professional school students vs. first year community college students, or between an urban and suburban populations? These data also provide a base for comparisons by schools who wish to utilize the inventory as is -- without modifications conforming to local conditions.

TABLE OF MEANS

(Expressed in percentage of possible scores)

	Items 1-25	Items 26-74	Total
Urban High School (8-12) (n= 161)	69.4	62.4	64.9
Suburban 8th Grade (n= 50)	72.5	64.4	67.1
Urban Junior College (n= 74)	77.8	67.1	70.6
First year Professional School Students (Rural and Minority) (n= 28)	78.2	70.7	72.9
Composite Means	74.5	66.2	68.9
Composite S. D.	9.9	9.3	8.8

Recent Data

One further analysis of recently collected data yields additional support for the usefulness of the inventory. This analysis addresses these questions: If the inventory is indeed tapping reading facilitating experiences, will it differentiate between groups of developmental and remedial readers? If so, which categories of items will prove most discriminating?

Consistent with the view of Quandt, Athey, Holmes, and others, that there is a positive correlation between self-concept and reading achievement, remedial students scored lower than developmental students on all but one item of the self and social construct scale (1-25). Item 7, indicating a greater willingness to speak before other students or adults, was the exception. On four items, the remedials scored dramatically lower (over 2 points); items 1, 8, 20, 21. It is interesting to note the content of these items:

1. I like being the way I am.
8. I believe that I will become better at almost everything that I do as I grow older.
20. I have a few close friends and several acquaintances.
21. School is a good place for making friends.

Patterns of differences were also apparent on the remainder of the inventory. The remedials made much lower scores on the items relating to Temperament and Hope, and the Family Unit. However, items relating to Culture, Cognitive/Aesthetic and Biological/Attitudinal were only mildly discriminating with this population. A surprise was the comparisons of those items classified under Life Options; remedials, more so than developmentals, tended to think it reasonable that they might enter professions such as journalism, education, and politics. What this indicates is not clear -- a more tenuous grasp on reality(?); a greater lack of information about what various occupations/professions entail(?); or perhaps, reality (?) - academic success is only mildly correlated to real life ventures.

The latter analysis represent only one suburban high school with a relatively homogenous student body. Analyses may reveal a quite different pattern in other populations; thus pinpointing other strong areas of "differences."

One point is clear, any sharp difference between a student's score and the means for his group, or between local group means and those shown here, should signal that there is a disparity worth noting. The yardstick which these scant data provide seem sound because life has become homogenous throughout the nation; and too, the underlying assumptions of school have always beens fairly uniform, no matter how disparate a community situation from that of the core culture from which our view seems to be derived.

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